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Go.....Teach all Nations...Matthew, xxviii. 19.

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SERMON LXXXII.

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THE TEACHING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

1 JOHN, ii. 20.—*But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*

THIS was said to a company of real Christians. They had united in a church, and covenanted to obey God. But in this church, as in perhaps every other, there were some who were Christians only in name. At the time the apostle wrote, they were assailed with dangerous errors, and some had actually apostatized. But the apostle, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, declared, that the persons who had apostatized never were *real Christians*. "They went out from us; but they were not of us. Had they been of us (that is, real Christians,) no doubt they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us."

Their apostacy, therefore, instead of proving that real Christians would ever apostatize, only proved that merely nominal Christians would; while it was reasonable to expect, that real Christians would not; for, said he, "*ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*"

An *unction* is a figurative expression, and refers to the manner in which the priests of old, and sometimes the prophets and kings, were set apart for their office. They were anointed with oil, in token of being endued with the Holy Spirit. The sign is here used for the thing signified: an unction, for the teaching of the Holy Ghost. Real Christians have this teaching: "*Ye have an unction.*" The effect is knowledge: "*and ye know all things.*" All things, in this place, means the things in question; the things about which the apostle was writing, and which he had before preached: the great truths of the Gospel.

The doctrine of the text then is, that **REAL CHRISTIANS ARE TAUGHT BY THE HOLY GHOST THE GREAT TRUTHS OF THE GOSPEL.**

This teaching consists, however, not in revealing to them these truths directly from heaven; but in leading them rightly to apprehend, and suit-

ably to feel the force of the truths as revealed in the Bible. He shows them, in the use of means, what the truths of the Bible are; and leads them to feel their force. Thus it is written, "They shall be all taught of God." "The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way."

I would now invite you to attend to this divine teaching; and to witness its effects upon the hearts and lives of men.

I. God has revealed, that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked;" that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, not subject to his law, neither indeed can be."

This truth is doubted by some, by others is denied; but the Holy Ghost teaches real Christians that it is a fact. By being made acquainted with themselves, they are convinced that their hearts were deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; that they were carnal, not subject to the law of God, neither indeed could be, while they continued in that state. They have found that they loved themselves and the world more than God; and by comparing this with his requirement, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," they have found, that it was enmity against him. It was serving the creature; and they could not serve two masters. They must "love the one, and hate the other; or hold to the one and despise the other;" they could "not serve God and mammon." And when they found, under the teaching of the Holy Ghost, that they did serve one, they felt that they were in fact opposed to the other. Hence, instead of boasting of the goodness of their own hearts, or the moral excellence of human nature; they cried, "Wo is me, I am undone." They were, in their own view, as they were in the view of God, *lost*. And when He who came to seek and to save, was seen dying for all, they felt that "all were dead." They feel so still. The doctrine of human depravity, as revealed in the Bible, appears to them a reality; and it appears to be as universal and entire, as God represents.

II. God has revealed that this is a state of guilt and of ruin. "Thou hast destroyed thyself." "The wages of sin is death." "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." This is also doubted by some, and by others is denied. But the Holy Ghost teaches real Christians, that they *have* "loved darkness rather than light;" that their deeds have been evil; that they have sinned against heaven and before God. They feel that they deserve to perish; and that unless they are, through grace, delivered from sin, they must perish. Hence, instead of crying, Peace, peace, and trying to cast the blame of their wickedness upon Adam, or upon God, they take it to themselves; and they feel that it belongs to them. "Father, I have sinned." "Lord, I am vile." "Pardon *mine* iniquity, for it is great."

III. God has revealed, that without a change, a great moral change, which he calls "being born again," no man can be saved. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." Real Christians know this also to be a fact. The Holy Ghost, by means of the truth, has given them such a view of themselves and of God, that they no longer marvel that men must be born again. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Men have carnal minds, which are "enmity

against God." And what can enmity against God do in heaven? Into that place entereth "nothing that defileth." But men are naturally defiled. "The Lord looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand, and seek him;" but, "they are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy, there is none that doeth good, no not one." Hence, they must be changed; or, in the language of the Bible, be "born of the Spirit," or they "cannot see the kingdom of heaven." Real Christians feel this. They know, that he who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, must shine into their hearts, and give them the light of the knowledge of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ. Hence they see,

IV. The reality of another truth which God has revealed, "In me is thine help. I, even I, am Jehovah, and beside me there is no Saviour." In days of impenitence and unbelief they may have sought help from others; but they never found it. They never found it till they felt, and that deeply, that it must come from God: and when they did find it, they were the first to cry, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory." "God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." "By grace are we saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God." "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost." Hence they see,

V. The reality of another truth which God has revealed: "Other foundation can no man lay (that is, for the immortal hopes of men,) than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." This is doubted by many, and by some is denied. Some trust to works; the goodness of God, out of Christ; and some hope to be saved, because they think themselves of too much importance to perish. But these are all refuges of lies; and however long Christians, in days of their impenitence, may have trusted to them, and however firmly they may have thought such hopes to stand; they have all been swept away. The commandment has come, sin has revived, and they have died; and they found no hope of life, till Christ was revealed to them as "the hope of glory." And thus he was "all their salvation, and all their desire." They see now with perfect clearness, that "other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

VI. God has revealed, that "whosoever believeth on Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life." This truth, it may be, once they did not believe. Their sins were so many and so great, so long continued and so aggravated, that they may have thought, when they first saw their sins, that God could not, even for Christ's sake, ever forgive them. But then they had no "unction from the Holy One," as to the infinite worthiness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But when that glory from Calvary burst forth upon them, with a brightness that put out the sun, they saw that "God could be just, and the justifier of every one that believeth." And as they gazed upon the length, and the breadth, and the height of that amazing love, which passeth knowledge, they felt that he would do it; and believing, they found rest to their souls. This prepared them,

VII. To feel another truth that God has revealed, "Unto you that believe, he (Christ) is precious." To others he may be like "a root out of a dry ground," having "no form or comeliness why they should desire him." He may even be set at nought, with the vain inquiry, "What is thy Beloved more than another?" But "unto you that believe, he is precious." Real Christians all know this. The Holy Ghost has given them such a view of his infinite excellence, loveliness, and glory, that he is to them, "the chief among ten thousand; altogether lovely." They need not now, that any man should teach them that Jesus Christ is precious; the same anointing teacheth them. They know it. It comes home with divine power to their hearts. They see in him "the fulness of the Godhead bodily," and love him with a love that is stronger than death. Hence,

VIII. They feel the reality of another truth that God has revealed; "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price;" and their hearts echo their duty: "Glorify God in your body and spirit, which are his." Hence you see them, in seasons of trial, not counting even life dear to them; but counting all things but loss, that they might win Christ, and be found of him in peace. And in doing this they experience the truth, not of one, or a few, but of many divine declarations. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you;" and "the peace of God passeth all understanding." "If a man love me, my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; and in keeping them there is great reward." In short, the whole Bible becomes to such persons the testimony of God; which is therefore believed; and to a great extent is illustrated and confirmed by their own experience. And when these truths are known by experience, they have a reality, a fulness, and a power, of which, before, the persons had no conception.

The man who *feels* the heat of fire has a very different conception from the man who only hears about it; or reads concerning it; or only stands at a distance and looks at it. His conceptions are cold; and when shivering under the blasts of winter, they do him no good. He may have read about fire, he may have seen it, may have disputed about its properties, and may have thought, perhaps, that he was acquainted with it. But when he comes near, and receives its genial warmth, and still nearer, and feels its penetrating heat, it has a reality, it has a pungency, of which before he had no conception. "My word," saith God, "is a fire, and a hammer; it breaketh the rock in pieces." The man who feels it, has a totally different conception from the man who only hears about it, or reads concerning it, or reasons and disputes about it. The conceptions of the latter are cold and heartless; and leave him dead in sin. The momentous truths of the Bible may appear to him like fables: may pass by him unheeded; and leave upon his heart no permanent impression. While to the real Christian, who has been taught them by "an unction from the Holy One," and who receives them in love, they have a reality, and they have a fulness and power, which stamp upon the Bible, and upon his heart, the impress of God.

In view of this subject, I remark,

1. That true religion begins with *experience*. It is experience, however, not of any thing enthusiastic, delusive, or uncertain, but of the reality and power of those truths which God has revealed. And this experience gives them a kind of knowledge of those truths, as to their reality, efficacy, and importance, which before they did not have. Some men doubt whether there is any such religious experience. The reason is, they have never felt it. The same general reasons lead some men to doubt the truths of the Bible; they have never felt them. Yet the Bible is true; and let a man feel its saving efficacy, and he will know that religious experience is a reality; a momentous and glorious reality. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." But we learn from this subject,

2. That this peculiar kind of knowledge which real Christians have, is taught them, not merely by men, but by the Holy Ghost. It is not a knowledge which they gain *merely* by seeing, or hearing, or thinking. They do not obtain this knowledge in any way merely by the unaided efforts of their own minds. These are all means, and must be used; but it is the Holy One who imparts this knowledge to men. Flesh and blood merely do not reveal it; nor does any sinful or finite spirit; but the Holy Ghost. It is by "an unction from the Holy One" that they receive this knowledge.

This is doubted by some; not, however, by those who receive the truth. They know things, which, they are perfectly convinced, they never should have known, had not the Holy Ghost taught them. The deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of the human heart; its enmity against God; its guilt in disobeying him; the necessity of being born again; that there is no hope for sinners but in the Lord Jesus Christ; and that none to whom he is revealed can be saved except they believe on him; his infinite fulness, divine excellence, and beauty and loveliness as a Saviour; the blessedness of believing on him, trusting in him, and obeying his commands,—are truths which all real Christians know; but which they are deeply sensible that they never should have known, had not the Holy Ghost taught them. The teaching of the Holy Ghost is attended with a twofold effect, it gives to those who receive it an experimental knowledge of divine truth; attended with a permanent conviction that this knowledge is from God. Hence,

3. We see the reason why they will not, for any opposite errors, renounce those truths, a knowledge of which the Holy Ghost has given. The apostle took this for granted. "Had they been of us," said he, (had they been real Christians, who had "an unction from the Holy One,") "they would have continued with us." How could he say that? Simply from the fact, that real Christians, who have been taught by the Holy Ghost the truths of the Gospel, in their own experience, will not renounce them. The reason he gives is, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." They have been taught these truths, sent down from heaven, by the Holy Ghost. They find them in the Bible. They find them illustrated in their own experience. They find them to accord with their condition as sinners, and to meet all their wants.

These things cannot be said of the opposite sentiments. Real Christians cannot find them in the Bible. They do not describe their true condition as *sinner*s; they do not meet their wants. To remove this difficulty, you may try to show them that they have no such wants as they suppose; that they have been among the enthusiastic, and are deluded. And upon this subject you may reason with great learning and acuteness; but their wants are not matters of mere speculation, but of *feeling*.

A man before you is starving; and you feed him on the east wind. He tells you that it does not satisfy him; that he wants food. You try to show him that he has no such want; that he has been among hungry men, and is deluded. You reason with great learning and acuteness; and, if he is not a learned man, he may not find it easy to answer you. But his wants are matters not of reasoning, though there is good reason for them; they are matters of feeling. And when a man feels pain, you cannot convince him that he has none. What he wants is *ease*; not proof that he has no pain. On that point he has proof enough; and proof which will for ever convince him; all your reasoning and efforts to the contrary notwithstanding.

A man is in agony under the pangs of conscious guilt in not having believed on the Saviour. What he needs is pardon; not proof that he has no guilt; on that point he has proof enough; and proof which will carry overwhelming and eternal conviction to his mind; though all the rest of creation should doubt it.

Suppose you undertake to prove to real Christians, that they have never had a carnal mind, or that the carnal mind is not enmity against God. How can you make them believe it? What revelation has God given to men, but the Bible? and where in the Bible is it written that when God looked down from heaven to see if there were any that did understand and seek him, he found that there were some that *had not* the carnal mind, or that the carnal mind is *not* enmity against God? And how can you make this accord with their experience? They were ten, twenty, perhaps fifty years, supremely devoted to themselves and the world. How can you show them that they were all this time not at enmity with God? Not from the Bible; this declares, "They have rebelled against me." Not from their own feelings; these cry, "Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great." Now, if all other men should declare that they never had carnal minds, or that the carnal mind is not enmity to God, Christians will not believe it: they know it to be false.

Try, if you will, to make them believe that they do not deserve to perish; and that if they should perish with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power, God would be unjust; and in their view you contradict the Bible; and you contradict also their own feelings, and that knowledge of themselves which the Holy Ghost hath given them.

Try to make them believe that they do not need the special influences of the Holy Ghost; and when they are quaking in fearful apprehension under conscious guilt, crying, Who will take away the heart of stone, and give a heart of flesh? or who shall deliver us from the body of this death? direct them to themselves, or to creatures, as their only hope and you only mock their anguish. "Miserable comforters are ye all."

But when they hear a voice from the throne, saying, "I will take away the heart of stone, and give a heart of flesh; and from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you;" and experience the truth of these declarations, they cry, "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Take another of those errors which stand opposed to the Gospel of Christ. Try to show real Christians, that although "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God," yet, that the Word was *not* God; and how can you make them believe this? Would God, say they, reveal to man a falsehood? and "when he bringeth his first-begotten into the world, command all the angels of heaven to worship" a *creature*? Could all things, "whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers," be created by, and for, a *creature*? and could the treasures of everlasting kindness and grace at an infinite expense be opened upon a guilty world, that all men should honour a *creature*, even as they honour the Father? And when they feel that they have, according to the divine declaration, destroyed themselves, that in God alone is their help; when they hear him say, "I am Jehovah, and beside me there is no Saviour;" how can you, by presenting a Saviour who is only a *creature*, meet their wants? And when Christ comes in fulfilment of his own promise, and manifests himself to them, and takes up his abode with them; when he manifests himself to ten thousand thousands of them, in thousands of different places; and when, wherever two or three are gathered together in his name, he is in the midst of them, and at the same time is in heaven adored by unnumbered millions; and when their own hearts respond to the heavenly song, "Blessing and honour, glory and power, be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever;" how can you make them believe that he is only a *creature*? How can you make it accord with the Bible? with that knowledge of Christ which the Holy Ghost has given them; which is life eternal; and which will lead them, wherever they are, through the whole period of their existence, to "walk in his steps?" No, it is not possible for the human mind to conceive of a system of errors which real Christians will find in the Bible; which will accord with their experience; which will describe their condition as sinners; and will meet their wants. This is peculiar to the Gospel, the glorious Gospel of the ever-blessed God our Saviour. Real Christians know this; and for this reason they will not renounce it; but will hold it fast, whatever it may cost them, and whatever may be the consequence, even unto the end; contending earnestly for "the faith once delivered to the saints;" and following them, "who, through faith and patience, now inherit the promises."

This inflexible firmness, this persevering adherence to sacred truth, which real Christians manifest, notwithstanding all the improvements which men imagine they have made, is thought by some to result from ignorance. They hold, it is said, to that old way, because they do not know any better. And it is a fact that they do not know any better. And so long as they continue to have "an unction from the Holy One," they never will. But, though they trust to the wisdom of another, yet they know something; and something, too, which is "hid from many wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes." Others, however, do not think

that they hold to this old way because they are ignorant, but because they are bigoted. They have, say some, been taught it, and they never will renounce what they have been taught. They have been taught it. This is what the apostle declares; but who was their teacher? Let the apostle answer. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One." He was their teacher; and they will not give up what he has taught them.

Two things are peculiar to the Holy Ghost as a teacher; his disciples will believe him; and what he teaches them they will never renounce; though they should be tempted, or sawn asunder, or slain with the sword; or have to wander about in sheep-skins, and goat-skins, destitute, afflicted, and tormented, on account of their faith, yet they will not renounce it.

"Should all the forms that men devise,
Assault their faith with treacherous art,
They'd call them vanity, and lies,
And bind the Gospel to their heart,"

This some think to be obstinacy. But it is not; for obstinacy will sometimes, after long continuance, give up. It may, in some cases, be overcome. But this can never be overcome. It holds to its object with a grasp vastly more firm, and it is more unyielding than obstinacy itself. It never will give up. "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." This is not obstinacy—no; it is faith; that faith which "has subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness been made strong, waxed valiant in fight," and will absolutely "overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil," and "come off conqueror, and more than conqueror, through him that loved us, and gave himself for us."

4. In view of this subject, we see, that it is not strange that different men, with the same external means, have very different views about the Gospel, and very different feelings towards it. It is not unaccountable that some men embrace it; and prize it more than they do thousands of gold and silver: and that others, of equal learning, talents, and opportunities, reject it. When Paul preached the Gospel, "some believed, and some believed not." But we have no evidence that those who believed had in all cases more learning, or talents, or opportunities, than some who believed not. Nor have we any evidence that those who had "an unction from the Holy One, and who "knew all things," were in talents superior to some who went out from them, and thus proved that they were not of them. It was not necessary to be superior in talents in order to know the truth, and be made wise unto salvation; for it is not human learning merely, or talents, or opportunities, which avail for the attainment of saving knowledge. These may be, nay, they are used as means, and the more of them, if devoted to God, the better; but this knowledge that is sanctifying and saving, is imparted by the Holy Ghost. If some men feel the need of his teaching, heartily seek it, and receive it, and other men do not, it is not strange that they should differ in their views about the Gospel, or in their feelings towards it. Nay, it would be strange if it were not so; for the truths of the Gospel are known by being felt.

Take, for instance, the doctrine of human depravity. If one man feels it, and when he looks into himself, finds that he is actually poor, and wretched, miserable, blind, and naked, in want of all things; and another man, when he looks into himself, imagines that he is rich, and increased in goods, and has need of nothing; it is not strange that the one believes the doctrine of human depravity, and the other rejects it. Just give to that man the same kind of evidence which the other has; let him look again into himself, his mind being enlightened by the Holy Ghost to "discern spiritual things," in a spiritual manner; and let him find, as thousands have found, that instead of being, as he supposed, rich, and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, he is actually poor, and wretched, miserable, blind, and naked, in want of all things; and he too will believe the doctrine of human depravity. He will feel it; and thus *know* that it is true. What the man needs may be neither learning, nor talents, nor opportunities; but an humble spirit, receiving the truth as God has revealed it. He needs *faith*; that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen." If one man has this, and another has not, it is not strange that they should differ in their views about the truths of the Bible, and in their feelings towards them. It would be unaccountable if it were not so.

And if some men, without "an unction from the Holy One," seem to embrace the Gospel, and afterward in time of temptation appear to fall away; and other men, who, by an unction from the Holy One, really embrace the Gospel, and, through evil report and good report, persevere in their belief and practice of it to the end; being kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation; it is no more than what, from the Bible, we had reason to expect.

And when this takes place, instead of being, as some suppose, unaccountable, and operating as a stumbling-block, it is only a practical illustration of Bible truth. And it ought to lead every man who beholds it, to trust, not in his own wisdom and goodness, or strength, but in the living God.

5. We see, in view of this subject, the reason why children and poor persons; persons of little learning and small abilities, sometimes embrace the Gospel; appear clearly to understand it, and deeply to feel its truths. It is because the Holy Ghost can and does teach them as really as others. The truths of the Gospel are adapted to their condition, and exactly meet their wants. They can understand them.

The little child, when weeping over the wickedness of his own heart, in godly sorrow and true penitence, understands the doctrine of depravity as really as a man; and more so, unless the man has been taught it in the same way, by *feeling* it. And that child may pray as sincerely, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me," as any man on earth. And he may turn from sin, look to the Lord Jesus, and believe on him, love him, and obey him; Christ may be formed in him the hope of glory; be all his salvation and all his desire; and be the end of the law for righteousness to him, as truly as if he were the greatest philosopher on the earth. The reason is, the Gospel, the glorious "Gospel of God our Saviour," is adapted, not merely to adult

sinners, or to learned sinners, or sinners of great talents; but to sinners of every class.

"This remedy did wisdom find,
To heal diseases of the mind;
A sovereign balm, whose virtues can
Restore the ruined creature, man."

And man, in every condition in which he is a sinner in a state of probation, and feels his need of pardoning mercy, is able to understand the Gospel, and is able to embrace it, and to be begotten again by it, unto a lively hope, which shall purify him even as God is pure. And this is one of the precious, unspeakably precious glories of the Gospel. It is adapted to sinners of every sort, and *whosoever will*, may embrace it. "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "Whosoever will, let him come; and him that cometh, I will in no wise cast out." "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls."

6. We see, in view of this subject, the reason why some men, with the Bible in their hands, are "ever learning, and yet never come to the knowledge of the truth." They do not feel their *need* of the teaching of the Holy Ghost. They perhaps do not believe "that there is any Holy Ghost. They do not seek his teaching. They do not obtain it. And the truths which he has revealed they do not believe. Hence, they grope in darkness at noonday, and stumble as in the night.

7. If Christians, to whom the Gospel has come, not in word only, but in power, in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, would have others to embrace it, and in such a manner that they will never renounce it, but be sanctified and saved with an eternal salvation; while they use all suitable means to convey divine truth to their minds, they must depend for success upon "an unction from the Holy One." And for this he "will be *inquired of*;" he "will be sought unto." Hence Christians, while they make all possible efforts to convey divine truth to the minds of men, should, at the same time, *abound in prayer*. "Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase." Nor is this the least discouragement either to effort or to prayer; it is rather the grand encouragement to both. For would any of you, being a father, should a famishing child ask bread, give him a stone? or should he ask a fish, would you give him a serpent? "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" "Ask, and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." "Every one that asketh receiveth, he that seeketh findeth, and to him who knocketh the door of mercy is opened." Let then Christians, who have "an unction from the Holy One," of every denomination and of every name, use the means of God's appointment, and there is no insuperable difficulty in the way of the conversion of sinners; or of a revival of true religion, which shall not stop till it has extended to every district, and state, and kingdom; and has reached to every family, and every in-

dividual on the globe. Give each a Bible; let him daily read it; and listen to it as to the voice of Jehovah; let the Gospel, the glorious Gospel of the ever-blessed God, be preached in purity and with power to every creature; let prayer, believing, effectual, fervent prayer, ascend without ceasing; and in answer, let there be given to all people "an unction from the Holy One;" and there would be a mourning for sin all over the earth: and then, let the Lord Jesus Christ be proclaimed as the only hope of glory, and every heart would embrace him; the song of salvation would echo from sea to sea; and the whole earth join the blest anthem, **TO THE LAMB THAT WAS SLAIN, AND HATH REDEEMED US TO GOD BY HIS BLOOD?**

SERMON LXXXIII.

By WILLIAM J. ARMSTRONG, A. M.

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PRACTICAL ATHEISM OF SINNERS.

EPHESIANS, ii. 12.—*And without God in the world.*

THE avowed advocates of atheism have never been numerous. Pride of intellect and depravity of heart have indeed led many to embrace opinions which would lead to it, if fearlessly followed out to their legitimate consequences. But atheistical doctrines are so completely at war with all around us, and all within us, that it seems scarcely possible for any to embrace them with a calm and deliberate conviction of their truth. Dark indeed must be that understanding which can nowhere discern traces of unsearchable wisdom and almighty power; and dead to every generous emotion that heart, which does not recoil with horror from the dark and desolate caverns of atheism. The Supreme Intelligence who presides over all things is indeed invisible and far above the comprehension of finite reason. Him no man hath seen or can see. He sits behind his works, covered with awful mystery, but in the veil that hides him from our view, his existence and agency are every moment seen, and heard, and felt. We do not doubt whether the sun shines at noonday, because its dazzling brightness renders us unable exactly to ascertain its shape and dimensions. As little should we doubt the existence of our Maker, because the overpowering splendours of his glory confound our imagination, and mock at the feeble efforts of reason to grasp or define them. I exist, therefore God exists. The universe exists, therefore God exists. No reasoning can be more direct and conclusive. Every exercise of consciousness, every operation of my senses, bears testimony to the divine existence. It is not wonderful then, that, while many have feared, and hated, and wished to shun the great Author and Judge of all, few have had the folly, the daring impiety, the infernal hardihood, to deny his existence.

But the truth which men cannot reject, they may alter and pervert, to suit their own feelings; or while they hold it uncorrupted, they may banish it from their hearts, and deny it that influence upon their lives which it demands. In this respect the Ephesians, to whom the apostle wrote, were "without God," until they heard and believed the Gospel. They were idolaters; worshippers of those deities, whose impure and cruel rites were at once the scourge and the shame of ancient Greece and Rome. They were not atheists, strictly speaking, but their gods were their own passions deified, and they ascribed to them characters, that would, in our day, banish men from all decent society. If any of them entertained more correct notions of the divine character, as doubtless some did, they "held the truth in unrighteousness," refusing to subject their hearts and lives to its authority. And as the expression of the apostle, "without God in the world," presents a just view of their character, so it correctly describes their condition. As they wilfully rejected the knowledge and the service of God, so they were aliens from his favour, and utterly destitute of that serenity and peace in life, that hope in death, and that blessedness in eternity, which flow from an interest in his love. In this respect, my brethren, their case was not singular. It is the criminal and unhappy condition of *all* our fallen race until they are renewed by the Spirit of God. It is ours to-day, if we have never been born "from above." Till the heart is changed by the Holy Spirit, every man is, in this sense, "without God in the world." However correct his notions of the existence and perfections of his Maker, he is practically an atheist. In the most important sense, "*without God in the world*," describes his *character*; and as to all that can inspire hope or justify joy, "*without God in the world*," describes his *condition*. To the illustration of these two points, let me now invite your attention; however painful the subject, listen, I pray you, to the testimony of Scripture and reason.

First: The *character* of unregenerate men is atheistical. They who admit the being of God, but deny all or any of his perfections, evidently reject the true God, and worship in his stead the creature of their own imaginations. That such are without God is too plain to need any illustration. The object of their worship is no more a reality, than the Jupiter of the Greeks, or the Brahma of the Hindoos. But admit the infinite majesty and excellence of our Maker, and you cannot deny that all rational creatures are under the most sacred obligations to love him supremely, to take his will as the rule of their conduct, and to seek his glory and the enjoyment of his favour as the great end of their existence.

The same conclusion is irresistible, if we regard him as the Author of our being, and the bountiful Parent of our mercies. Every generous and noble principle and feeling of our nature calls us to love, obey, and glorify him who gave us life, who feeds and clothes and protects us, who crowns us with loving-kindness and tender mercies. You would justly esteem that man a monster of ingratitude, who should disregard obligations to a fellow-man, unspeakably less than what you owe to the Father of mercies.

In addition to the perfect excellence and loveliness of his character—and to his creating and preserving power and goodness, recollect, that God is the author of eternal salvation, that he hath given his only-begotten Son to die for a fallen world, that he hath provided, at an infinite expense, for the pardon of our guilt, our renovation to holiness, and our exaltation to perfect and everlasting purity and bliss in his presence; and then say, if his claims to our love and obedience are not strong and sacred, and tender beyond all expression: and judge ye, if they who live in the daily and hourly disregard of claims like these, are not, emphatically, *without God in the world*. Are they not fairly obnoxious to the charge of practical atheism? And are they not surely, and justly, in a state of dreary alienation from the favors of him whom they profess to know, but in works deny?

Now, he who knows the human heart has testified that such is the natural character of men. They say unto the Almighty, "depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy way." The wicked, by reason of the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God. God is not in all his thoughts. "The fool," (so the Bible speaks of the wicked, for every sin is an act of the grossest folly, because for a trifling and transient gratification, it hazards an infinite and eternal good,) "the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."

But to discuss this point more in detail—Unregenerate men are without God, because his love is not the reigning principle of their conduct; his law is not the rule of their lives. His glory and the enjoyment of his favour are not the end they seek.

The love of God is not the reigning principle of action in unregenerate men: so the Bible teaches. I know you, said the Saviour to the unconverted Jews, and by them, to all of similar character in every age and country, I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. "The world hateth me, and he that hateth me hateth my Father also. The carnal mind is enmity against God."

The same truth is evident from the necessity of regeneration. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God!" But why? Because, my brethren, love to God is essential to an admission to that kingdom, and a participation in its joys. Love is the animating principle of that kingdom, the golden bond which unites all its happy subjects to each other, and to him who sitteth on the throne. This imparts to their obedience all its worth; to their praise all its harmony; to their joy all its sweetness and perpetuity; to their communion with God, and each other, all its confidence and bliss—and because men are by nature destitute of this, therefore they must be *born again*; or they cannot enter the mansions of holiness and joy; and if admitted, they would pine and perish even there for want of every thing congenial to their tastes and feelings.

The impenitence and unbelief of men prove them destitute of love to God; for did they love him whom they have offended, they would surely mourn over and forsake their sins, and joyfully accept the offers of his forgiving love. But, to make the argument more personal, permit me to ask the impenitent. Where are the evidences of your love to God? Does it show itself by any of those marks which ever indicate love to any object? When any thing earthly engrosses your affections, does it not occupy your thoughts? Does it not give direction to your powers of mind and body? Does it not assume the throne in your souls, and compel every opposing principle to bow to its supremacy? Does not the friend think often and tenderly of his absent friend, and long for the time when they shall meet again and reciprocate the testimonies of mutual affection? Does not the votary of ambition exert every nerve to gain power and secure the applause of his fellow-men? Does not the miser lay his plans and put forth his energies to increase his treasures? If God is the object of your supreme affection, will you not think *often* of him, with love and veneration? Will you not rejoice that he is ever present? Will you not see his beauty in all that is lovely? His grandeur in all that is sublime? His majesty in all that is venerable? His purity in all that is holy? If he permits you to approach his throne, if he invites you to communion with him, will not your bosom thrill with joy? Will it not be the paramount object of your exertions, while you live, to please and honour him? Will not your dearest wishes and fondest hopes centre in the everlasting enjoyment of his love? But is it thus with you? Do you love to think of God? Do you love to reflect that his eye is ever over you, and that you are surrounded by his presence? Or do you feel more at ease, when you forget that he is near? Have you not often, have you

not habitually gazed on the beauty and grandeur of his works, without one suitable thought of the Creator? When and where has he beheld you joyfully bending at his footstool? May he now behold his love reigning in your hearts, directing your energies, and causing you to rejoice in the light of his countenance, and to look forward with inexpressible emotions to an abode in his heavenly presence? Answer, O conscience, in the name and in the presence of the heart-searching Judge! Ah, sinner, may not an Omniscient Saviour say, as to the Jews, *know you, that the love of God is not in you?*

Again, as the love of God is not the reigning principle in the hearts of unregenerate men, so the law of God is not the rule of their lives. This follows as an inevitable consequence. For supreme love to God is the sum of all that his law requires. Wherever therefore this is habitually wanting, the whole life is evidently an habitual violation of the law. A man may do many things which the law requires, without any regard to that law, and of course without obeying it; for God looketh on the heart. Thus a man may have a native tenderness, or honesty, or mildness, or he may assume the appearance of these amiable qualities; and he may thus be led to the practice of kindness and charity, to integrity and honour in his intercourse with men, and to a placable and forgiving deportment; all useful and lovely in themselves, and certainly required by the law of God. Yet in all this there may be no true obedience to that law, no special regard to the authority of God. The mind may still be carnal and the sentence of inspiration concerning it, that "it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Natural sensibility, deference to the opinions of men, the desire of earthly good, the fear of present or future suffering, are all principles which may lead to a course of conduct in some measure conformable to the law of God, yet very different from that supreme love to him which his law demands. Under the influence of these principles, a character may be formed containing many worthy and amiable traits, and its possessor may move along cheered by the smiles of his fellow-men, unconscious of any fatal defect, while yet he may be living *without God in the world*, and in the day of decision, the finger of Omniscience may write on all that men have admired, *Weighed in the balance, and found wanting!*

A radical defect in the obedience of such is often indicated by its want of universality. The kind and charitable person is often a lover of pleasure, more than a lover of God. The honest and upright man is often one who loves the world and the things of the world, so that *the love of the Father is not in him*. The mild and placid bosom, that is not ruffled by passion, nor haunted by malice, may be the seat of the most chilling and atheistical indifference to the honor of God, and the eternal interests of men. In all such cases, whatever wears the semblance of obedience to God is not real; for if his authority were paramount in the soul, the character would be uniform. A little self-examination might teach such persons that they are without God in the world. For they do not study his word as their rule of life. They do not ask its counsel in their perplexities. They do not appeal to it as the last resort.

But if the moral, the amiable, the exemplary, among the unregenerate, do not make the law of God their rule of life—much less do the avaricious, the dishonest, the profane, and the licentious. Nothing is more evident than that all who are habitually guilty of gross sin, have cast off the authority of their Maker, Sovereign, and Judge. Their sin is open, going before them to judgment.

Again, if the love of God does not reign in the hearts of unregenerate men, and if the law of God is not the rule of their lives, then it is plain that they neither seek his glory as the great end of their being, nor his favour as their supreme happiness. To glorify God and to enjoy his favour, is the twofold

end of man's existence; combining in itself his most sacred duty and his most precious interests. And he who disregards it, commits treason against God, and suicide upon his own soul. But if men do not take the law of God as the rule of their lives, certainly they do not seek to glorify him! No: they rebel against him, and their rebellion shows itself, in the only possible way—by disobedience. And if his love does not reign in their hearts, they certainly cannot desire, nor seek, nor could they enjoy his favour. No: they love and serve the creature more than the Creator.

The gratification of self is the unworthy end to which they prostitute their immortal powers, and for which they barter immortal happiness.

And now let me ask, what more is necessary to constitute a character, in all its essential elements, and all its prominent features, *atheistical*? What direct and immediate influence does the presence of the Eternal exert on such men? Through the influence of society around, their passions may be restrained, and their characters modified by these great truths. But suppose, for one moment, there were *no God*, and that public opinion, the customs of society, and the habits and feelings of all around, were just what they now are—would not these men live just as they now do? Are they not, then, *without God in the world*?

But, *secondly*—As unregenerate men deny God a throne in their hearts, as they refuse to love, obey, and honour him, so he casts them out of his favour: and they are without God as their guide in life, their refuge in death, or their portion in eternity.

As his creatures, his tender mercies are over them, for they are over all his works. As accountable beings in a state of trial, to whom salvation is offered, and by whom God will manifest the greatness of his mercy or display his wrath, and make known his power, he bestows on them many favours, he prolongs their lives and supplies their wants. He bears with their transgressions, offers them a full and free, a complete and eternal salvation; sends his Spirit to strive, commissions conscience to warn, allures by mercies, and accuses by his judgments. But in all this he expresses no approbation of their conduct, gives no testimonies of his special favour. On the contrary, he frowns on all their evil ways, and is angry with them every day! The hour hastens, when, unless a change of heart and life prevent, they will find they have only treasured up "*wrath against the day of wrath*"—that in the sunshine of mercy, they have ripened for judgment—and that abused goodness is the most abundant source of self-condemnation to the damned! For a season, they may enjoy the bounties of Providence, forgetting the great Author of all; and virtually saying, *Who is the Lord, that we should obey his voice?* But ere long he will say, *Give an account of thy stewardship.* Then to the fading honours and fleeting pleasures of time must succeed eternal infamy and woe. Surely, they are without God in the world!

They do not look to God, the only wise, to be their guide. They do not ask of him wisdom to direct—and he leaves them to the way that seemeth right in their own eyes, though *the end thereof is death*. On the ocean of life, they will not take the Saviour as their pilot, nor his word as their chart; nor will they seek the propitious breathings of his Spirit; and of course the current bears them wide of the haven of eternal rest; they are bewildered by the mists of error, and tossed by the storms of passion, and wrecked at last on the shores of a hopeless and miserable eternity. Are they not without God?

The offers of salvation made to them, and pressed upon them by motives the most affecting, and still rejected, or put off to a more convenient season, cease at length to be heard with interest, or to leave an impression. The Spirit of grace, at times, almost persuading the sinner to be a Christian, often grieved, and always resisted, at length is withdrawn for ever. Every

good impression made on the heart, by mercies or afflictions, by promises or threatenings, by warnings of conscience, or striving of the Spirit, and erased by any means, leaves it harder and less susceptible of impression than before, until the most pointed truths fall upon it, as arrows of reed on the rock of adamant. Then hope bids the man farewell for ever. For though he may still live, his judgment lingereth not; his damnation slumbereth not; he is forsaken of his Maker; he is without God in the world!

Death is inexpressibly solemn. But where God is loved, and honoured, and obeyed, his promises support the soul, his presence is its solace, in this trying hour. The light of his countenance irradiates the dark valley, and though heart and flesh fail, he is the strength of the heart and its portion for ever. But he who lives without God, must die without God—and shall I trace the progress of the immortal spirit as it enters on the retributions of eternity without God? becoming, as its powers expand, more sinful, more odious to God, and holy beings, and itself; sinking deeper, and deeper, and deeper still, in infamy and woe! O righteous God! who can describe how fearful a thing it is to fall into thy hands, when thou arisest to vindicate injured mercy and rejected grace!

Surely, to live without God is criminal and unhappy; to die without God, gloomy and dreadful; to spend eternity without God, awful and insupportable.

Who of us is now living without God? Who of us has never been born from above? has never come penitent and humble to the foot of the cross? Who of us has lived to this hour without loving God supremely, or obeying his law as the rule of life, or seeking his glory and his favour as the great end of life? Who? Searcher of hearts, thou knowest—impenitent sinner, *thou art the man*. Thou art living without God. And unless a great and speedy change prevent, thou wilt die without God; and, dying without God, O what an eternity awaits thee!

